

Hamlin, Mary P
HE CAME SEEING: a play in one act.

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He Came Seeing: A Play in One Act: by Mary P. Hamlin

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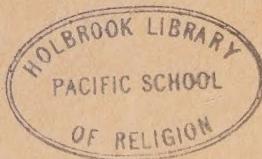
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**SAMUEL FRENCH, Publisher, 25 West Forty-fifth St.
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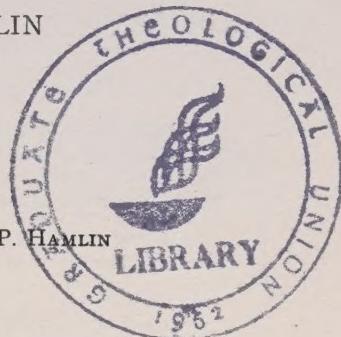
HE CAME SEEING

W.M.H.
1952

A ONE-ACT PLAY

BY
MARY P. HAMLIN

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HE CAME SEEING

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CHARACTERS

ASA:

He is a man in the early forties, the best type of loyal, respectful servant.

JOAB:

Asa's son, born blind, a lad of eighteen. He is tall and slender, but, owing to his blindness which makes him stoop, he seems shorter than he is. His bearing is gentle, timid and patient. His mother's over-carefulness has made of him a child, robbing him of possible responsibility.

HILKIAH:

A fine type of Jewish aristocrat. He is loyal to the traditions of his nation and has no question of the value of them all. He is between forty and fifty years of age.

JUDITH:

Wife of Asa. Like all Oriental women, she is a child, with the simple, curious mind of the woman who has no outlet for her mentality except her housework and gossip with other women. Long care of her blind son has made her gentle and sad, at times, but has not matured her otherwise. She is essentially an eager, curious, gossiping little girl, though she shares with other women of her class a sort of community knowledge of the basic facts of existence. She is about thirty-five years old.

ANNA:

A more spirited woman than Judith, and a bit more mature, because of her tendency to think

CHARACTERS

for herself. The lives of these women are quite without incident, their only excitement being gossip about the well. They cannot read and have no books if they could. Having practically no contact with the outside world, they do not mature as their husbands do. To this day, the Oriental woman is a child of impulse and curiosity. She giggles with self-consciousness and loves to see and touch any object new to her.

From this description, it will be seen that Judith and Anna should be played with an abandon of childish curiosity, glee in gossip, and quick change from anger to laughter or tears.

NEIGHBORS:

The crowd that follows Joab may be as large or as small as the Director desires, but there should be a few children in it.

COSTUMES AND PROPERTIES

A description of the dress of Palestine may be found under "Costumes" in the "Glossary of Antiquities" at the back of the Oxford Bible. The Tissot pictures are suggestive and accurate.

In general, Hilkiah should be dressed as handsomely as possible. The others are poor people. It is winter and their clothes should be heavy. Oriental people love bright, strong colors and the "veils" of the women are heavy, homespun affairs, not filmy as the word suggests.

The brazier may be any low, wide metal dish with coals made of red electric bulbs under charcoal. Incense will make a thin line of smoke.

The "bread" of the Orient is a flat cake, like a large pancake, only stiff. This could be imitated by cutting out round pieces of corrugated pasteboard.

A Good Biblical Drama

"HE CAME SEEING." *A one-act biblical play by Mary P. Hamlin. Samuel French, 35c.*

AT LAST! Mary P. Hamlin who eight years ago gave us "The Rock," probably our strongest full-length biblical play, now gives us a one-act play of equal power and beauty. In the meantime, some hundreds of well-intentioned but untrained amateur playwrights have been turning out biblical plays by the score, but mostly of a quality that adds nothing to the understanding of the Bible or of the struggles of men's souls. In "He Came Seeing," Miss Hamlin takes the story of a blind man whom Jesus healed and shows the universal elements in it. Whereas most biblical dramas are content with the presentation of a miracle, Miss Hamlin sees that there is no drama in a miracle itself. Drama is in struggle—not in release from it. The real drama in this story comes in the opposition which the sanhedrin brought to bear to persuade the man against testifying in behalf of Jesus. He has to choose between silence and safety on one side and testimony and ostracism on the other, and the welfare of his family hangs in the balance. The factors which make for strong drama are here: character, struggle, action, climax, choice, and theme. The play requires three men, two women, and a group of neighbors. The costumes and properties are simple. Churches and young people's groups looking for new dramas of emotional strength and religious value will find one here.

FRED EASTMAN.

(in the "Christian Century")

HE CAME SEEING

SCENE: *A room in a small stone (or mud-brick) house in Jerusalem. In back wall are two long narrow slits for windows. There is no glass, but heavy shutters drawn back against the wall show manner of closing. Center: brazier on floor. Upper Right, an outside door. Near it, on back wall, is a rough wooden rack holding several pottery water-jars. There is a shelf on the left wall, holding a few crude cooking utensils, including a copper bowl, highly polished. Left Center, a low, homemade bench; a roll of rugs in Left corner and a small wooden stool, Right.*

TIME: *A morning in December, the last year of Jesus' life.*

(As the curtain rises ASA is seen standing, somewhat impatiently, by the door. Down Center, JOAB stands with bent patience, enduring the many fussy little arrangements that JUDITH is making to his clothes. She flings his heavy cloak over one shoulder, drawing it tight about his neck. She fusses and pats and loves him, treating him like a little child. JOAB stands meek and willing, accustomed to it and liking it. He has never waited upon himself. He has a staff in his hand and when he moves he gropes his way, feeling timidly with staff.)

JUDITH. (*With a final unnecessary pat, and speaking with exaggerated cheer*) Careful, Son.

JOAB. (*Listlessly*) Yes, Mother.

ASA. (*Sharply*) Come.

JOAB. Yes, Father. (*He begins to grope his way.*)

JUDITH. (*With another pat to cloak*) Watch him, Asa. (*To JOAB*) You'll stay right where father puts you? (*Bright, forced cheerfulness as if to a child.*)

JOAB. Yes, Mother.

JUDITH. I'll come at noon and we'll take a nice walk about the Temple porch.

JOAB. Yes, Mother.

(ASA takes JOAB firmly by the arm and they turn to go. JUDITH stands watching them sadly, shaking her head in pity.

(Enter ANNA, U.R., nodding to ASA and slipping by JOAB without his noticing her as she flattens herself against the wall to let them pass.)

JUDITH. (*With a little cry*) Wait! Your barley cakes! (*She runs up and takes from shelf three little flat cakes. These she hands to JOAB.*)

JOAB. (*Standing inert and speaking in disappointed tone*) Won't you bring them hot?

JUDITH. It's Sabbath.

JOAB. (*Sighing*) Oh, I forgot. (*He feels way with staff, cakes in hand.*)

JUDITH. (*Running to him, taking cakes and slipping in his girdle*) You mustn't carry them. That's doing work.

JOAB. (*Patiently*) I forgot.

ASA. Mustn't forget to keep Sabbath holy, Son.

JOAB. No, sir.

(ASA and JOAB go out U.R.)

ANNA. Poor boy! If there's anything I hate it's stale bread.

JUDITH. I always bake it fresh other days, but I can't bake on Sabbath, can I?

ANNA. (*Giving JUDITH an appraising look, then speaking with sudden daring*) I did, once.

JUDITH. (*Shocked but interested*) Oh, Anna!

ANNA. Well, I forgot all about making bread the night before.

JUDITH. How could you?

ANNA. I don't know, but I did; so Sabbath morning I made some nice hot cakes and *nothing happened*. (*She looks defiantly at JUDITH, lips pursed, head held back.*)

JUDITH. It was a sin. You should have gone *without*.

ANNA. I won't let my family starve for *Anybody*.

JUDITH. (*Clapping hand over mouth in fascinated horror*) Ohhh! (*She looks at ANNA and they stand like children discussing delicious, forbidden things. JUDITH clutches ANNA and pulls her confidentially down on bench, speaking in a scared whisper*) Anna, did you ever forget to tithe? (*She watches her friend eagerly. ANNA shuts lips tight, looks at JUDITH out of corner of eye, then, with wicked joy, she rocks herself back and forth and nods her head up and down.*) So did I—once.

ANNA. Anything happen to you?

JUDITH. Not a thing.

ANNA. Well, then! Judith, will you promise never to tell as long as you live? (*JUDITH nods with passionate interest.*) Swear by your head.

JUDITH. (*Placing hand solemnly on headband*) By my head.

ANNA. (*Bragging*) I don't tithe half the time.

JUDITH. (*Shocked squeal*) Anna!

ANNA. Hasn't anything happened—yet.

JUDITH. (*Admiring but frightened whisper*) How'd you dare?

ANNA. (*With zest*) Well, once I went to market to get some mint and cummin for a lamb stew. I was so excited about having meat—it was my Thomas' birthday—I forgot to tithe the spices. I never *once* thought of it till after I was just going to sleep that night. I was scared all night long, expecting— (*JUDITH catches her lower lip in her teeth in understanding terror*) —but *nothing happened*. And then, I tried it again, on purpose, and nothing has *ever* happened; so now I just don't bother about tithing spices and little things.

JUDITH. (*Shocked into realizing the enormity of the offence*) And you call yourself a Pharisee?

ANNA. Of course, I'm a Pharisee.

JUDITH. (*Jumping up and facing ANNA accusingly*) Not if you don't keep the law.

ANNA. (*Less certain*) Well, I have enough to do with all my housework, weaving and cooking and toting water for my family, without bothering to mess with every little bit of spice I use.

JUDITH. Then you aren't a Pharisee. That's all.

ANNA. (*Scared and savage*) I am, too, a Pharisee. I guess I'm own third cousin to Prince Caiaphas; and don't we eat Passover at the Palace every single year?

JUDITH. (*In an outburst of self-pity*) Then it isn't fair. Here I keep the Law just the best I know how, and I have a blind baby that has to grow up a beggar, and you don't even *tithe*, and your baby's all right, and you're invited to the High Priest's Palace for Passover.

ANNA. (*Bursting to tell her news*) Judith, will you *promise never* to tell anybody, if I tell you something?

JUDITH. (*With a quick shift from reproof to curiosity*) Not a soul.

ANNA. (*Gloating with her news*) Well, last year, when we went to the Palace, I kept my eyes open. You know, of course, we don't eat in the big room with the Prince and his grand friends because we're poor and we're only third cousins, anyway, so we always eat in the court, near the kitchens; and I got talking with one of the scullery girls—after—and—Judith, you won't tell, because I promised on my head I wouldn't—but they don't tithe, up there, the way they tell us. *Not in the High Priest's kitchens*, they don't. And what's more, Prince Caiphas knows and doesn't say a word.

JUDITH. (*Genuinely shocked*) Isn't that *awful*?

ANNA. I could tell you worse'n that.

JUDITH. (*Eagerly*) Go on.

ANNA. There's all kinds of parties up there at the Palace, with Roman officers and things not lawful—(*eyes round with delicious horror*.)

JUDITH. (*Sudden reaction, realizing that they are going too far*) We ought not to talk like this. Asa says it's our place to respect our betters. He's confidential servant to Hilkiah, the best-known Pharisee in Jerusalem, and there's things *he* knows—(*bragging*)—I could tell you, but I won't.

ANNA. (*In an agony of curiosity*) Oh, do.

JUDITH. (*Struggling between temptation to show off and fear of her husband*) I don't dare. Asa'd find out. But I know things in high places— (*She purses lips and is aggravating*.)

ANNA. Oh, please tell.

JUDITH. (*Trembling on the verge, but pulling herself together*) I don't dare. (ANNA clutches, pleading.) No. (*She shakes her off*) I can't. (*Her mind reverts to her wrongs*) What I don't understand is why God made my baby blind.

ANNA. (*Glibly*) Sin.

JUDITH. What have *I* ever done?

ANNA. You must have done *something*—you or Asa or Joab.

JUDITH. (*Sullen*) I keep the Law better'n you.

ANNA. You do now—yes—but probably you were a great sinner in a former life, Judith. Anyway, the wrath of Jehovah is upon you. You can see that.

JUDITH. (*Sighing*) Yes. Well, I keep the Law the best I can, and so does Asa, and we've brought Joab up strict. He never does anything wrong.

ANNA. (*Frowning*) No, he's blind.

(*As always when women gossip, the air becomes tense. Each strives to know the most and each is annoyed with the other for keeping back possible news. They are verging on a quarrel.*)

JUDITH. Well, you needn't tell me that. I know he's blind. Just because you have a son that's all right, you needn't be so mean. I guess if you had to tend your boy, year after year, the way I do—never a free minute—

ANNA. (*Thinking of her own troubles*) You tend him too much. He could do more for himself, if you'd let him. *Everybody* says so.

JUDITH. Oh, they do, do they? Well, then, everybody can mind their own business. I don't happen to want my boy to wait on himself. I want him to depend on me for *everything*.

ANNA. (*Sullen*) Yes, that's what every mother wants. Blindness isn't the worst trouble in this world.

JUDITH. (*Defiant*) What's worse?

ANNA. (*Bitter*) Losing your son.

JUDITH. (*Too self-centered to understand*) Oh, yes, I couldn't do without Joab. I'd die if I lost him.

ANNA. No, you wouldn't. You'd go right on living, same as always, only the heart inside you would be broken.

JUDITH. (*In panic*) You think Joab looks sick? What you scaring me about his dying?

ANNA. Who said anything about dying? There's ways of losing besides dying.

JUDITH. (*Shocked out of her own sorrow by ANNA'S bitter tone*) Anna! What you mean? Is it your Thomas? (*ANNA nods grimly with tight lips.*) What?

ANNA. (*Bursting with pent-up suffering*) Judith, I lost him. He's gone. I gotta tell someone.

JUDITH. (*In scared whisper*) When?

ANNA. Oh, I don't mean *that*. He comes home nights, but he's different. I have worn my fingers to the bone for that boy, Judith, and he don't pay any more attention to me than if I wasn't around. Nights he sits by the brazier and don't speak. If his father asks him a question, likely he don't even hear.

JUDITH. Perhaps he's sick.

ANNA. No. I almost wish he was, then I could nurse him and he'd need me, same as your boy needs you. That's what hurts so—he's through needing me. He won't even tell me what he's thinking.

JUDITH. Why don't you ask?

ANNA. I have, but it's worse when he talks—he says such things. His father gets so angry—angry—I've tried to reason with him, but now he don't talk at all and he don't want to hear a thing I have to say. Oh, dear, I love my boy so, but if I was *dead*, he wouldn't care.

JUDITH. Hush, Anna! That don't sound like your Thomas. I think it's only because he's growing up. They say boys are like that—(*sadly*)—boys who can see.

ANNA. Oh, it's more than that. Something's troubling him, but he won't ask our advice. He used to be such a hand to ask questions. Remember?

JUDITH. (*With a quick laugh remembering the child*) Yes—"Why?"

ANNA. Oh, my sakes! It was "why," "why," "why" from morning to night. I used to be about crazy with him. I'd say we must be getting ready for Sabbath, and he'd say: "Why?" I'd say "because it was the Law," and he'd say "why was it the Law?" I'd say "because Moses said so." He'd say, "Why did Moses say so?" I'd say because "Jehovah told him to," and he say, "Why did Jehovah tell him to?" And so on and so on, but now—(*She throws up her hands*)—he don't ask any more. He don't care what we think. It was that very thing made his father so provoked, one night, when he did talk.

JUDITH. About Sabbath?

ANNA. Yes, he said it was silly to bother keeping Sabbath the way we do. He said God didn't *care*,—said—wait till I think. It was so queer what he said—Oh, yes. "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath."

JUDITH. (*Proud that she understands*) I know what's the matter with him. He's been hearing that fellow from Nazareth talk. That's one of the very things's been reported he said.

ANNA. Reported? What you mean?

JUDITH. I ought not to tell. I promised Asa I wouldn't, but you should know. He's a dangerous man. Our young men are following him. He's heading a revolution and my husband's Master, Hilkiah, and some others of our leading men, they've got *spies*, and they're going to arrest him before the Romans. (*Claps hand over mouth*) Oh, don't you ever tell I told, Anna. Asa'd be that provoked because it's a great secret, but they know every single person that's listening to him. You must stop your Thomas.

ANNA. (*Clutching JUDITH*) What shall I do?

(*The two women stand staring at one another in terror as ASA enters U.R. He looks suspiciously at them, noticing their alarm.*)

JUDITH. Asa, Anna's Thomas is hearing that man from Gallilee talk.

ASA. (*Sharp suspicion*) You haven't been telling her?

JUDITH. No, sir, I haven't told a thing, only—

ASA. (*To ANNA*) How do you know he is?

ANNA. I don't know, Asa, only he's changed, my Thomas is, and he says things that scare me.

ASA. What?

ANNA. Well, one night—now, you won't ever repeat this if I tell you?

ASA. Go on.

ANNA. He and his father were disputing and his father backed up his side by quoting Moses, and Thomas said that Moses had been dead a long time, and, anyway, he didn't know all there was to know, and that there was newer ideas—

ASA. The very thing that carpenter said to my master. "Moses says so and so, but *I* say—" (*The women gasp in horror.*) Now, Anna, you mustn't repeat a word of what I tell you, but the leading Pharisees are after this fellow. He's bad. The way I know was taking in the wine. There was supper at my Master's last night and all the slaves were sent out—after—only I had to take in wine—keep it cool and take it in—so I couldn't help hearing. But my Master knows he can trust me. (*Sharply*) You won't tell? (*Both women shake heads vigorously, looking at him with scared eyes.*) If the Romans suspect another revolution, it's all up with our people. The fellow hails from a little mountain town and he's the most ignorant, brazen— Why, the other day he called King Herod a *fox!* Publicly! Said to some leading citizens: "Go, tell that Fox."

Fox, to the Roman Governor! What do you think of that?

ANNA. Oh, I don't believe my boy's listening to a man like that.

ASA. Well, if he is, you want to stop him and stop him quick.

ANNA. Easier said than done. Your Joab does what you tell him to, but Thomas— Oh, well, I just don't believe he's listening to a bad man. He wouldn't.

ASA. You'd be surprised the people who do listen; decent people, some of them; though most are a pretty bad lot. You must be silent about this if I tell you, but the other day he had a crowd—slaves, publicans and prostitutes,—and he was stirring up that rabble to believe that Jehovah took an interest in them. He claims to know all about God, and he told them that there wasn't so much as a tail-feather on a sparrow that God didn't care about. As my Master said, "You can't let *that* kind of talk go on."

ANNA and JUDITH. (*Shocked*) Oh!

ASA. He's crazy, of course; but he's dangerous. I'd rather see *my* boy dead at my feet than listening to a fellow like that.

JUDITH. Oh, Joab wouldn't listen.

ASA. Well, he can't, thank God. He can't run about after rebels.

JUDITH. No, blind but *safe*. (*Noise of crowd outside door.*)

(Enter JOAB, U.R., followed by a crowd of neighbors made up of men, women and children. His entire appearance has changed. His head is up, his face radiant, as well as wet. His hair is also wet, and, when he opens his outer cloak, his clothes are seen to be wet and clinging. The most startling thing, however, is that his eyes

are open and it is evident that he can see. He looks eagerly from ANNA to JUDITH.)

JOAB. Mother! Which? (*He runs to ANNA, feels her up and down eagerly, shakes his head. Goes to JUDITH, feels her, and gives a glad cry*) Mother! (*He kisses her on both cheeks and holds her off by the shoulders, looking deep into her eyes*) I said: "I will not look, I will not see till I have seen my mother's face. That must be first." Oh, you are beautiful, but your eyes are sad. I thought they would be happy eyes. Oh, my Mother, how I love you! (*He runs his fingers lightly down her arms and laughs with infectious gaiety, in which the children join*) Isn't it funny? I see you with my eyes, now, and yet to be sure you are my mother, I must feel. (*Suddenly he skips up and lifts copper bowl from shelf, his face illumined with happiness*) Oh, this is the bowl we eat out of! Wonderful! (*He holds it aloft in an ecstacy of admiration*) It is? (*He nods for confirmation to his mother*) It is the one I have always helped you polish. You said it must be kept shining, but oh, my Mother, I did not know shining was so beautiful.

ASA. Son, you see?

JOAB. (*Bounding to his father and running fingers up and down him*) Father! (*He is like a fawn, glad and gay, as if only beauty and gladness existed.*)

ASA. (*Voice stern with awe*) How did you get your sight?

JOAB. (*Without stopping his darting from one object to another, and bending down to run his hand about the cheek of a little boy who clings to him*) I sat right where you put me, Father, by my column in Solomon's porch. Oh! (*He draws the little boy to him and they hug in an ecstacy of joy.*) Oh, little John, how sweet you are! (*He keeps his arm about*

the boy and, as other children crowd about, he touches them affectionately, as he talks) Some men were coming and I held out my bowl. I heard one of them ask who had sinned—you, Father, or Mother, or I, and, oh, I was so angry. They cannot say my Mother sinned. Then, suddenly, another man spoke, and ah—*(His face is radiant)* What a voice! I can tell, by men's voices, whether they are good and friendly, or bad and dangerous. This man's voice—it was strong. I knew he must be big. It was an outdoor voice—like a man who had slept on the ground and climbed mountains. He was no weakling, like me, and yet his voice was full of friendship, as if he *liked* you, though he spoke quite sharp to the man who asked the question. Short and sharp he answered, as if he knew what he was talking about, and what do you suppose he said? “*Nobody* had sinned, but that the work of God is going to be seen.” I felt the strangest, most thrilling *something*, and then, he was stooping over me and putting mud on my eyelids and he spoke—oh, so kindly, and yet with command: “Go. Wash in Siloam.”

JUDITH. Oh, my son, you *didn't*? Not alone?

JOAB. Mother, I *had* to. If you had heard his voice, you'd know I *had* to. *(He looks down at the eager child who snuggles close to him and he lifts a dark curl wonderingly, exchanging a loving smile with the boy.)*

JUDITH. But you *promised!* Oh, the danger!

ASA. Hush, Judith. And then?

(From time to time, as he goes on with his story, one or another of the neighbors push up and touch him in friendly congratulation. He nods brightly and lovingly to each without interrupting his tale. All through this scene there is a happy exchange of glances and handclasps, showing him

to be beloved by all. The little boy keeps his place close.)

JOAB. He went off with his friends and I got up and tried to start. Oh, I was frightened. I had never found my way alone.

JUDITH. (*Looking at ANNA*) Never.

JOAB. (*Tweaking the boy's ear and laughing with him like a boy*) And I didn't want to disobey you, Mother. It was dreadful, all alone, and I almost gave up, but *Something* made me keep on. It was the ring in his voice I couldn't forget. I kept feeling my way and getting all turned about, and lost, and then I was at the steps and I knew I had found the pool. I threw off my cloak, Mother, and plunged right in. (*All during this recital the little boy has watched his face with grave intensity. At the triumphant end of the tale, his little face lights up and he and JOAB exchange a happy hug.*)

JUDITH. Oh! Oh! In the water! All by yourself!

JOAB. It was terrible, the plunge, but I got my sight! Oh, Mother! (*He picks up the little boy and swings him high above his head to the shrieking joy of the child. All the others are awed and solemn, but JOAB and the boy laugh and shout like young and happy gods in a crowd of terrified mortals.*)

(Enter HILKIAH U.R.)

ASA. (*Bowing to ground*) Master!

JUDITH. (*Bending low*) My lord!

ASA. You honor my poor house.

HILKIAH. (*Looking rapidly about and pointing to JOAB*) Is that your son, Asa?

ASA. My only son, sir. (*Short and sharp to JOAB*) Son, this is my Master.

JOAB. (*Pleasantly but without awe*) Sir. (*He nods brightly.*)

HILKIAH. Was he ever blind?

JUDITH. Born blind, sir.

HILKIAH. It is your son, the same son?

ASA. Our only son, my lord.

HILKIAH. (*To crowd*) You, here, do you know this boy?

NEIGHBORS. Yes.

FIRST NEIGHBOR. (*Stepping out*) Yes, my lord, I know him.

HILKIAH. (*Sharply to another*) You? Do you know him? (*The Second Neighbor, who is an old bald man, shakes his head with deliberate obstinacy*) Well, did you know the son of these people?

SECOND NEIGHBOR. Oh, yes, Your Honor, I knew him very well.

HILKIAH. So? It isn't the same?

SECOND NEIGHBOR. No, sir. This is a different boy.

(*At this an excited pantomime of argument begins in crowd.*)

HILKIAH. How different?

SECOND NEIGHBOR. Well, for one thing, this fellow is a foot taller. (*JOAB and the boy punch one another and laugh.*)

JUDITH. He does look taller, standing so straight. His blindness made him stoop.

SECOND NEIGHBOR. Oh, it isn't only that. This boy's got spirit. Joab is a poor devil.

JOAB. (*With a gay laugh*) Wasn't I, Eliakim?

FIRST NEIGHBOR. It's Joab, sir. I'd know him anywhere. We all know him.

JUDITH. (*Fiercely to SECOND NEIGHBOR*) I guess I know my own son. (*The quarrel becomes general*)

in pantomime and JOAB and the little boy poke one another and enjoy the fun.)

SECOND NEIGHBOR. Oh, I admit the fellow looks like Joab—*some*. Not much when you look at him close.

FIRST NEIGHBOR. 'Tis too Joab.

SECOND NEIGHBOR. 'Tain't, I tell you.

JOAB. (*Laughing and swinging boy about*) Oh, ho! Eliakim, you don't know me! That's rich!

HILKIAH. Are you, or are you not, Joab, the son of Asa?

JOAB. (*Instantly sober, standing straight, one arm about boy*) Sir, I am he.

HILKIAH. Were you blind?

JOAB. Oh, yes, sir—blind.

HILKIAH. Are you sure you see now?

JOAB. I see! I see!

HILKIAH. (*Looking close into his eyes*) Are you sure?

JOAB. (*Face radiant*) Sure.

HILKIAH. Well, if you really see, what do I look like?

JOAB. (*Gravely*) You, sir? It's rather hard for me to say. I haven't seen much in this world, yet. I kept my eyes almost closed till I got home because I wanted my mother's face to be the first. (*He looks lovingly at JUDITH.*) But there was one thing I did see, coming, and I think, sir, you're like that.

HILKIAH. (*Kindly*) Indeed, what was it?

JOAB. It was a palm tree. I know, because I have passed it many times, felt it, and asked my mother what it was. She told me it was a palm tree.

HILKIAH. (*Pleased*) Well, so I remind you of a palm tree? A Royal Palm. In what way?

JOAB. (*Without thought of impudence*) Well, sir, the trunk's hard, like stone. It looks dead all the way up, but when you get to the top—— (*He shakes his finger craftily*) Look out! It's alive there. It

isn't thrilling with life, the way you expect a tree to be—not full of warm, friendly life, like common trees—like all these friends of ours here—(*he smiles very sweetly at neighbors*)—but, all the same, there's life at the top—(*he taps head significantly*)—for all it looks so dead. (*He beams at HILKIAH, hoping he is pleased.*)

HILKIAH. Well! Really!

ASA. (*In frightened reproof*) Why, Joab!

(*This is a great moment for the crowd, hearing someone who dares "speak up" to an aristocrat. They are scared but delighted, and ANNA cannot repress a quick giggle, though she instantly claps hand over mouth. JOAB and the children are the only ones who do not sense a tense situation.*)

JOAB. (*Pleasantly*) Have I said anything amiss? He asked, and it's all I have seen that seems like him. (*He looks about*) Now, this bench, he's not like that, Father. That's lowly and serving, like you, Father. (*He takes up bowl*) Or this bowl! (*He holds it high in two hands*) You'd never say he was like this! Now, would you? Shining! This is like— (*Face radiant*) You know, I didn't see the man who cured me, Father. He was gone when I came seeing, but I heard his voice and I think he must look like this. (*He gazes in admiration at bowl*) Shining!

HILKIAH. (*Too fine to be much offended*) Then you didn't see the man?

JOAB. No, sir.

HILKIAH. Well, I did, and I want to warn you, boy, that he's a dangerous fellow. Asa, I am afraid this is going to get you into trouble. I mean to help you if I can.

JOAB. Where did he go?

HILKIAH. (*For the first time showing bitterness*)

He went into the Temple, after breaking the Sabbath—the blasphemer!

JOAB. How did he break the Sabbath?

HILKIAH. Why, by curing you, boy. That was work, wasn't it?

JOAB. Oh, that was the work of God. He said so. I know it was, anyway, because I felt it *here*, inside me. Nobody but God could get *inside* you, could they?

HILKIAH. (*With restrained patience*) He put mud on your eyes. That was working.

JOAB. (*Trustfully*) But it wasn't the mud cured. It was what happened *inside*. The mud on my eyelids made me know something was going to happen, and then it did; but it was God worked.

HILKIAH. Hush, my boy. God doesn't work.

JOAB. *He* said He did.

JUDITH. Oh, my darling, you mustn't—

HILKIAH. (*Stern for the first time*) You, born in sin, are you trying to teach *me*?

JOAB. In the Temple, you said? I'll find him. He'll know. (*He drops the boy's hand and runs off U.R. gaily, the crowd making way for him. JUDITH starts after him, but ASA pulls her back.*)

JUDITH. (*Pulling away*) Oh, if anything should happen!

ASA. He isn't blind, *now*.

HILKIAH. Let him go. Clear out these people. (*He makes authoritative gesture to crowd, which backs out U.R., with curious backward looks. The little boy with his mother is the last to leave.*)

HILKIAH. Asa, this is a serious matter. When the thing happened and I was told it was your boy, I came to warn you. (*The parents bow low.*) We had a meeting of the leading citizens last night. You know. You brought in the wine. It took a mighty lot to warm them up. (*He smiles genially.*)

ASA. (*Gravely*) Yes, my lord, and it was your

best—the oldest. I wondered, sir, if you meant so much.

HILKIAH. Well, to tell the truth, I didn't. I hadn't any idea it would take so long to come to a decision. There was more opposition—but we finally settled it to recommend to the Sanhedrin that anyone who acknowledges this carpenter shall be excommunicated.

JUDITH. (*With scorn*) Oh, the disgrace!

HILKIAH. (*With a meaning look*) Yes, my girl, disgrace and worse.

JUDITH. (*Realizing that she is involved and terror stricken*) Oh, sir, we've always been respectable. I couldn't bear disgrace.

HILKIAH. (*Kindly*) No, and I don't want you to. That's why I came. Asa is valuable to me. No man ever had a more faithful servant. (*The men exchange a look of confidence as Asa bows low.*) I couldn't let harm come to his home.

ASA. I thank you, my lord, most humbly. (*He kisses border of robe.*)

JUDITH. (*Greatly excited*) Why, sir, if you're cast out of the Synagogue, there can't anybody give you fire or water. Nobody can speak to you, and, at the well, my lord, where I go for my water, who'd help me get my jar back onto my head after it's full? Women have to help each other with the lifting, Your Honor. You can carry a full jar, once it's on your head, but you can't put it on your head alone. (*She illustrates with many gestures.*)

HILKIAH. Now, don't be frightened. I can get you out of it, if you'll do exactly as I say.

JUDITH. (*Kissing his robe*) It's most noble of you, sir.

HILKIAH. Did you see this man?

ASA. No, Master.

JUDITH. (*With frightened vehemence*) No, never.

HILKIAH. Never spoke with him? (*They shake*

their heads in energetic and frightened denial.) You don't know anything about his healing your son?

JUDITH. No, sir, only our boy said—

HILKIAH. Never mind what he said. Be careful to tell only what you *know*. Nothing else.

ASA. We don't know one thing except he is our son and was born blind and now he can see.

HILKIAH. (*Relieved*) Oh, well, then, stick to that when you're brought before the Council.

JUDITH. (*With shriek*) Before the Council? Oh, sir, they won't make us go, will they? We haven't done any harm. We're very particular. We keep Sabbath and we tithe, *always*. I never miss— (*Her conscience accuses*) Well—once I did, but—now, there's a neighbor of ours and she—

ASA. (*Sharp*) Hush!

JUDITH. (*Angry and frightened*) You don't think I was going to *tell* on her, do you? Only, if there's folks got to go before the Sanhedrin—

HILKIAH. You'll have to go.

JUDITH. (*Whimpering like a child fearing a beating*) What'll they *do* to us?

HILKIAH. Nothing, if you stick to it that you don't know this man and don't know how your boy got over his blindness.

ASA. But we do, Master. He told us.

HILKIAH. No, Asa. You don't know anything except what you have seen for yourself. Be blind to everything else and you'll be safe.

ASA. (*Looking front and speaking in a whisper as if he sensed a deeper meaning*) Blind and safe?

JUDITH. But my boy? Will he have to go before the Council?

HILKIAH. Yes.

JUDITH. Oh, sir, they won't cast him out! He couldn't help it!

HILKIAH. Not if he'll say what I tell him to say.

JUDITH. (*Eagerly*) He will! He will!

ASA. Doesn't the Sanhedrin want the truth, sir?

HILKIAH. We know the truth, Asa. We've made a thorough investigation.

ASA. But a man who can heal the blind, my lord?

HILKIAH. Give God the glory. As for this fellow, he is a sinner and a danger to our Nation. I know, Asa. I, myself, have given valuable time to listen to his talk, so that we should be certain of our facts, though we have had spies, for a long time, bringing us every word. I have heard the fellow utter blasphemies about Jehovah that made my blood run cold. With my own ears I heard him tell a shocking story to show what Jehovah was like. It was about a man who had two sons—one decent and one bad. The bad one went off and lived a loose, wicked life till he'd spent all his money and, finally, got work *feeding pigs*.

JUDITH. (*Nose elevated in disgust*) Ohhh!

HILKIAH. Yes! A Jew taking care of pigs! Can you get anything lower than that? Well, he finally started for home, meaning to own up how bad he'd been and take his punishment, but, if you'll believe it, his father was watching for him—(*JUDITH is so entranced with the story that she has entirely forgotten everything else and shows by her wide eyes and ecstatic expression how delighted and absorbed she is*)—and ran out to meet him. (*JUDITH claps her hands.*) And never gave the fellow a chance to say he was sorry for his disgusting conduct, but he ordered the servants to dress him up in the best clothes they had, and jewelry, and invited a big company to meet him. (*JUDITH likes it better and better.*) And when the older brother—the decent one—very properly objected, the father said: "This my son was lost and is found. Of course we must be glad."

JUDITH. (*Clapping hands*) Oh, what a lovely story!

HILKIAH. But he was talking about *God*.

JUDITH. (*Face falling*) Oh, well, of course—

HILKIAH. If men are to do as they please and then have a fuss made over them—

JUDITH. (*Wistfully*) I suppose God is very angry with us, sir, when we sin?

HILKIAH. Of course, and nothing but the fear of God's wrath will make people behave.

JUDITH. Yes, I know I wouldn't tithe every little thing if I wasn't afraid. Would you, sir? (*She is curious to know whether he really does.*)

HILKIAH. No, that's it. This young man is spreading dangerous ideas, and the worst of it is that our boys are listening to him. It's got to stop and it's going to stop.

ASA. It was good of him to cure my son, but I wish he hadn't done it on the Sabbath.

HILKIAH. Oh, well, he says the Sabbath isn't of any consequence.

JUDITH. (*With a shocked squeal as she claps hand over mouth*) Ohhh! (*She is, however, more curious than shocked*) Tell me some more he said, sir.

(Enter JOAB U.R., with the crowd behind him and the little boy beside him, his arm about the child. He is full of joy and confidence.)

JOAB. It was God that worked. I knew that was what he said. I found him, sir. He heard that I was going to be cast out of the Synagogue and he was looking for me. Wasn't that kind of him? Oh, Mother, you must see him. His face is shining like a bowl—only different.

HILKIAH. So he's heard about the excommunication, has he?

JOAB. (*Cheerfully*) Yes, but I told him he needn't

worry about *that*. They'd never cast anybody out because he wasn't blind any more, would they, sir? (*He laughs at the absurdity of the idea, but ANNA grasps JUDITH's hand and they exchange a quick, anxious glance.*) God working in us—wanting to make us beautiful! Isn't that thrilling, Mother? Oh, I knelt at his feet and begged him to let me stay with him always, like the young men who were with him when he cured me.

HILKIAH. So you are his disciple, are you? (JOAB shakes his head with a sober face.) Why not?

JOAB. He wouldn't let me. He said I had leaned on other people too long as it was. If I stayed with him the spirit of God wouldn't have a chance to grow in me.

HILKIAH. God—a chance! Fire of Gehenna, what do you mean?

JOAB. Why, you see the kingdom of Heaven isn't a place, way off here—(*he flings out his right arm*) —or there. (*He flings out his left.*) He says it is inside us and it has to have a chance to grow. He said it was something like yeast that my mother puts into leavened bread. At first, it doesn't seem it's going to do a thing, but, in the end, it raises the whole lump.

HILKIAH. Well, of all the disgusting talk! It's worse than I feared.

JOAB. Of course it's a new idea. I always thought God was way off somewhere, sitting on a gold throne and watching us close to see that we didn't skip any of the rules. It's so different I was afraid I didn't understand enough to go on without him, but he said, yes, I did. All you need is to begin giving God a chance.

HILKIAH. God—a chance! Sacrilege!

JOAB. No, it's true, I know. It was my faith gave God a chance to cure my blindness. He said so. I

felt it. It was like a well of healing springing up inside me. God working.

HILKIAH. Stop, boy! God doesn't work. Servants work, and slaves and poor people. Jehovah is a mighty Ruler lifted up above the circle of the Heavens.

JOAB. That's what I used to think, too, sir, but it's wrong. He knows—he said he did. I can tell you it's good news for us poor people that God loves us and is as interested in us as he is in rich people and nobility.

HILKIAH. The man must be mad.

ANNA. Could a mad man open the eyes of the blind?

ASA. Perhaps he has to be a little mad to do it.

JOAB. He isn't mad. He's just as quiet and *plain*. He says—

HILKIAH. I don't want to hear any more what he says. I want to know what you are going to say, young man, when you're brought before the Sanhedrin.

JOAB. (*Delighted*) Oh, shall I be taken to the Sanhedrin?

HILKIAH. Yes.

JOAB. Father! Think of that! (*He looks about at his friends in ingenuous pleasure*) The Council wants to hear about my cure. Oh, sir, I'm glad, though my cure isn't really the important thing. What matters is God—his being friendly and near—

HILKIAH. Enough!

JOAB. Very well, sir, I'll save the rest for the Sanhedrin. I hope I can tell it right, but it's so big and so different—

HILKIAH. You've just one thing to tell the Council and that is that you don't know one thing about the man who cured you. You don't know who he is nor where he came from, do you?

JOAB. Why, no, sir. I didn't think to ask.

HILKIAH. Say so, then.

JOAB. But that isn't the important thing—who he is. What matters is that he was sent by God. He told me so. And you see, sir, if a man's sent by God, it's the message that counts—the good news—

HILKIAH. Young man, I'll have you understand the Sanhedrin isn't interested in news.

JOAB. Aren't they? Well, after all, they're not so important. This good news changes everything, because if God is *in* everybody, why, a man's likely to pop up anywhere with God working in him like yeast. It's a big idea, isn't it, Father?

ASA. Too big, my son.

JOAB. How could it be too big?

ASA. Too much life in it.

JOAB. Life! Yes, he spoke about life—abundant life. He said he had come that we should have abundant life. Doesn't the Sanhedrin want abundant life, sir?

(*Hilkiah throws up his hands in despair of the boy's ignorance. He looks, not unkindly, at Asa.*)

ASA. (*Gently*) My son, your blindness has kept you from understanding the real world you live in.

JUDITH. I didn't want you to know, my darling.

(*Joab looks from one to the other in astonishment. The neighbors nod their heads wisely.*)

ASA. We thought to spare you suffering. You had enough with your blindness. (*He looks sadly into his eyes, hands on shoulders*) But now that you see, Joab—

JOAB. (*Frightened by their seriousness*) Father, what do you mean?

ASA. There's things in this world that have to be

preserved—preserved at all cost—old things. Abundant life you talk about would sweep them away.

JOAB. How would it?

ASA. How can I explain? (*Thinks*) Remember helping your mother sew new skins for the wine every fall?

JOAB. (*Return of old gaiety*) Yes, Mother said I made good ones, too. I *liked* helping.

ASA. Why did we have to make new ones each time?

JOAB. Oh, the new wine, when it got working, would burst the old, dried— (*Something in his father's face arrests him, and slowly the truth dawns*) You mean abundant life would burst—?

ASA. (*Hand on JOAB'S arm*) My son, sight has come to you. It is a blessing, but don't see too much.

JOAB. (*Looking front, his eyes wide with a new fear*) All my life afraid of darkness, must I now fear the light?

ASA. There's more danger in it.

(*Father and son stand facing one another with tragic understanding, but JUDITH does not understand and is impatient.*)

JUDITH. Asa, what are you talking about? There isn't one bit of danger if Joab says exactly what your kind Master tells him to. Prince Hilkiah is a very wise man. You couldn't have a better adviser.

JOAB. But I have.

JUDITH. Who?

JOAB. My Father.

JUDITH. Oh, well, your father wants you to do as the Prince says.

JOAB. I mean God.

JUDITH. (*Shocked*) I don't like to hear you speak that way about God.

JOAB. But that's the whole point of the good news,

Mother. All my life I have been led by others, but now I know I have a Guide within. I see.

ASA. Don't try to see too far, at first, boy. (*He takes his hand.*)

HILKIAH. You have one duty, and only one—to obey your parents. So long as a man lives, he is subject to his parents. It is the Law.

JOAB. The law of Moses, but there is a higher law.

HILKIAH. What?

JOAB. The law of a man's own soul—the Father within—

JUDITH. How could a law be higher than Moses?

JOAB. A greater than Moses has spoken to me, Mother. I have had an experience of the truth that God works in me. He charged me that I must be true to the light—even—why, he said if a man lived the way he did, he'd have to be willing to hate his father and mother—

HILKIAH. Horrible!

JUDITH. (*Wailing*) After all I've sacrificed for you.

JOAB. (*Gently*) Try to understand, Mother dear. He didn't mean it that way. It was only that he knew how dependent I had been and now—why, there is a higher law than the law of obedience to parents—the law of a man's own soul.

HILKIAH. Young man, when you are cast out of the Synagogue, no one will give you so much as a drink of water, or a coal to light your fire.

(*JOAB does not understand. He looks puzzled. HILKIAH beckons to crowd to come down.*)

ASA. For a little time yet, my son, you must lean upon others. You have never worked. You have no trade. Among strangers you would starve. Your own people will stand by you and help you to learn

how, but the Romans are cruel. You would stand no chance with them.

JOAB. Cast out? Out of my own *people*? Out of my own *home*? That is impossible. I do not believe it. (*He turns to neighbors*) Why, you are all my old friends. You would not go back on me?

(*The crowd stands sullen without reply.*)

HILKIAH. Every Jewish door will be shut against you and you will be driven from the Temple porch where you have so long sat with your begging bowl.

JUDITH. The disgrace! No decent life after once having been outcast. I could not bear it.

ASA. Dear boy, I understand the struggle in your heart, but this world is too hard a place for perfect loyalty.

JUDITH. (*Pleading*) You wouldn't disgrace me, Joab?

JOAB. What are you asking of me, oh, my Mother?

HILKIAH. (*Sternly*) Silence, nothing more. When they question you, you do not know.

JOAB. (*Half to himself*) One thing I know: I was blind, now I see.

HILKIAH. (*Eagerly*) Say that, but as for this Jesus—silence.

ASA. You do not need to lie. In gratitude for all the weary years our hands have led you, be silent for our sakes. *Afterward*, follow the voice, but now—

JOAB. (*His arm still about the little boy, who looks up in wonder at the seriousness of his face*) When the call comes, if you do not answer it, who knows whether it will come again? Who was it that said: "Seek the Lord while He may be found. Call upon Him while He is near"?

HILKIAH. The Prophet Isaiah.

JOAB. He knew.

ASA. They killed him for knowing—cut him in four pieces.

JOAB. Oh—

ASA. (*Desperately*) If you want to be safe in this world, don't see too much, and what you do see, don't talk about.

HILKIAH. (*Sternly*) You must decide. Stand by this stranger and every friend you have in the world will desert you. Here, you! (*To the neighbors*) If this young man is cast out, how will you treat him? (*The crowd gives a low growl and draws back as one man.*) You will not speak to him?

CROWD. No.

HILKIAH. You will not feed him?

CROWD. (*With stronger voice*) No.

HILKIAH. You will not warm him by your fire nor give him a drink from the well?

CROWD. (*In a fanatic shout*) No, no!

HILKIAH. Henceforth he is accurst, a vagrant, and an exile from home and country, and if one of you so much as speaks a word of pity in his ear, that one, too, is outcast. (*The mother of the little boy grabs him hastily by the arm and drags him away. The child tries to cling to JOAB, but cannot. JOAB looks at them all in amazement.*)

JOAB. Why, Anna? Mary? Eliakim? Little John? (*To each he reaches out arms of pleading and is repulsed by each*) You would not go back on me, my old friends? You have always been so kind to me, helping me in my blindness. (*His voice become desperate in pleading*) How could I do without your friendship?

HILKIAH. They must desert you. They have no other choice if they would live. Speak, men.

CROWD. (*Pushing back*) Ugh! Outcast!

JOAB. (*He reaches out his arms to the little boy, but the child has become frightened by the abhorrence of the crowd and shrinks away from him,*

clinging to his mother's skirts and hiding his head)
My little John, too? Father? Mother? (*He turns to his parents in agony of pleading*) You will stand by? You would not have me disown the man who gave sight to my eyes and to my soul?

HILKIAH. (*Not without sympathy*) Father and mother must disown you. They dare not otherwise.

JOAB. (*Holding out his arms in frightened and heart-broken pleading*) Father! (*ASA shakes his head slowly and sadly, but he draws back.*) Mother? (*It is the cry of a terrified child. He is about to fling himself upon her breast, but she, too, draws back. JOAB is horrified.*)

HILKIAH. Is a stranger worth giving up all this for?

JOAB. (*Slowly*) Yes, he is worth it.

HILKIAH. Very well. You must choose.

ASA. (*Stretching out his arms*) Joab! Just this once shut your eyes for my sake.

JUDITH. (*With a broken cry of pleading*) Son!

JOAB. Oh, warm and friendly blindness, is *this* the price of seeing?

HILKIAH. (*Sternly but still not unkindly*) It is the price.

JOAB. (*Eyes turned slowly front and kept at gallery level*) Then I will pay it, but oh, God in Heaven, I did not know that seeing cost so high a price.

CURTAIN

NOT SO LONG AGO

Comedy in a Prologue, 3 acts, and Epilogue. By Arthur Richman. 5 males, 7 females. 2 interiors, 1 exterior. Costumes, 1876. Plays a full evening.

Arthur Richman has constructed his play around the Cinderella legend. The playwright has shown great wisdom in his choice of material, for he has cleverly crossed the Cinderella theme with a strain of Romeo and Juliet. Mr. Richman places his young lovers in the picturesque New York of forty years ago. This time Cinderella is a seamstress in the home of a social climber, who may have been the first of her kind, though we doubt it. She is interested sentimentally in the son of this house. Her father, learning of her infatuation for the young man without learning also that it is imaginary on the young girl's part, starts out to discover his intentions. He is a poor inventor. The mother of the youth, ambitious chiefly for her children, shudders at the thought of marriage for her son with a sewing-girl. But the Prince contrives to put the slipper on the right foot, and the end is happiness. The play is quaint and agreeable and the three acts are rich in the charm of love and youth. (Royalty, twenty-five dollars.) Price, 75 Cents.

THE LOTTERY MAN

Comedy in 3 acts, by Rida Johnson Young. 4 males, 5 females. 3 easy interiors. Costumes, modern. Plays 2½ hours.

In "The Lottery Man" Rida Johnson Young has seized upon a custom of some newspapers to increase their circulation by clever schemes. Mrs. Young has made the central figure in her famous comedy a newspaper reporter, Jack Wright. Wright owes his employer money, and he agrees to turn in one of the most sensational scoops the paper has ever known. His idea is to conduct a lottery, with *himself* as the prize. The lottery is announced. Thousands of old maids buy coupons. Meantime Wright falls in love with a charming girl. Naturally he fears that he may be won by someone else and starts to get as many tickets as his limited means will permit. Finally the last day is announced. The winning number is 1323, and is held by Lizzie, an old maid, in the household of the newspaper owner. Lizzie refuses to give up. It is discovered, however, that she has stolen the ticket. With this clue, the reporter threatens her with arrest. Of course the coupon is surrendered and Wright gets the girl of his choice. Produced at the Bijou Theater, New York, with great success. (Royalty, twenty-five dollars.) Price, 75 Cents.

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